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Why the Students Flunked the CIA

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It was the National Student Assn. which first sought out CIA funds in 1952 to send Americans to world student gatherings, and it was the same NSA which, 15 years later, made the initial moves to sever the secret financial ties between the two groups.

In the interim, there was a vast change in the thinking of American college students — from "dedicated and idealistic" young people in the early 1950s to the way one observer describes today's students, "alienated from the nation's own institutions."

This is the background to the current controversy over secret CIA financing of students, labor groups and dozens of other organizations which has involved Congress, the White House and the academic establishment, along with many others in the past few weeks.

During the 15 years of the secret subsidy, the CIA poured an estimated \$200,000 a year into the NSA alone, not counting untold millions into labor groups and other agencies.

To understand the furor, it is necessary to examine the changing American college student. V. Dennis Shaul, who was president of NSA in 1962-63 put it this way:

"This whole break represents an extreme difference between

student leaders of my generation and the present generation.

"We were internationally minded and wanted to promote the best aspects of America. We thought it was worth doing, both because it would have a good effect on domestic policies, and it would promote international good feeling for the country.

"The leaders of NSA today are more concerned with alienation from the nation's own institutions. It is in this light that they concluded that the relationship was intolerable."

Eugene Groves, the current president of NSA, said the student group made moves to end the CIA link because "in the past two years the officers have believed that conditions have changed so that they do not justify the existence of a covert relationship with government agencies."

He also said the group felt its CIA ties were "inconsistent with the democratic, open nature of the NSA," and pointed out "an obligation of trust to the students of the nation and our own personal principles demanded that such a relationship be determined and that all sources of funding be open."

The issue of "principles" was the dominant one in the entire long history of the CIA and the NSA. In the late 1940s and early 1950s American student groups who went abroad to tell this nation's story at international

student gatherings found themselves pitted against overwhelmingly well-informed and well-financed groups from behind the Iron Curtain.

As Grove explained it, in 1952 the student group's officers found "it was impossible to obtain funds from private groups" to carry on the overseas programs.

"The officers . . . felt that the existence of heavily financed and totally controlled Soviet-front organizations in the international student field made it imperative that democratic and progressive organizations maintain a presence abroad which would offer an alternative."

The first agreement between CIA and NSA was arranged by William Densor, now U.S. aid director in Peru. In 1952, he was president of NSA. Many other people now in important positions of government, were also NSA officers then, including S. Douglass Cater, Jr. special assistant to President Johnson.

Over the years, the CIA funds came in through secret payments to foundations, which then acted as conduits making apparently legitimate "grants" to NSA, at the rate of \$200,000 a year.

Usually, the NSA's top officers were told of the CIA link; and the other numbers were not informed.

It was this knowledge by the top NSA officers which led to the first disengagement. Philip Sherburne, the 1965-'66 NSA president, began dickering for more student autonomy. Eventually he went to Vice President Humphrey, looking for alternative ways of financing NSA.

But by this time, CIA, too, was wearying of NSA connections and the money had dropped off to some \$50,000 a year.

Sherburne was indirectly responsible for ending the connection completely, by telling of it to another official, who told Ramparts magazine.

Ramparts, which sees itself as a spokesman for the growing New Left, ran the story in its March issue; took full-page newspaper ads beforehand to scoop itself, and opened a floodgate of comment, criticism and anger.

Some criticized the CIA for secretly subverting the students and other organizations. Others, like Sen. Robert Kennedy, felt the CIA was taking "a bum rap," saying Presidents Eisenhower, Truman, Kennedy and Johnson knew all about the payments.

And a special — and quickly appointed — panel named by President Johnson reported last week that the CIA did nothing legally wrong, and even acted under policies established by the National Security Council.

The public controversy continues unabated. And as for the NSA, the student group which started the whole thing — it is now seeking to end it, as President Johnson has ordered CIA to do. Said Sam Brown, a Harvard divinity student who heads NSA's 10-member supervisory board:

"We are desperately trying to disentangle ourselves."

He said the NSA wants to make a "complete and permanent break" with CIA.